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MARCH 2, 1964 11:00 am.

TELEPHONE NOTES
THE PRESIDENT TO
SECRETARY MCNAMARA

A Bob, how are we doing?

B Oh, fine, I think, Mr. President. . I thought your press conference was terrific. . . came over damn well. . .

A Well, we got another one on Wednesday. . one of these quickie ones, so you find us some stuff over there.

B I'll do everything I can. . I thought I'd hold one Thursday before I leave. . I'm going to have to do it either then, or at plane side. . I might as well control it over here.

A What's new. . . anything?

B No. . . I think we're coming along reasonably well. . we've had. . really quite an underground battle here on missile dependability. . . . Goldwater's charge, and the Air Force has been. . . I think I mentioned to you briefly. . . feedingsurreptitiously both because it supports their desire for a manned bomber, and also because I think there's a substantial number up there that are pro Goldwater. . but I think we've got it reasonable well under control, and I'm having issued today a very strong statement, Paul Nitze. . . Secretary of the Navy, to be concurred in by Admiral McDonald, saying in effect that it doesn't make any difference whether the Air Force's bombers or missiles are reliable. . that the Navy can win the war alone. . . And. . documenting it. . it doesn't say quite that lanaugage but the theme of it is that. . and I think. . .

A Won't that start a fight between them?

B That's what I'd rather like to do. . .
divide and conquer is a pretty good rule in this situation. . and to be quite frank I've tried to do that in the last cku ple of weeks. . it's coming along pretty well. . I think we've got Goldwater dampened down for the minute on attacking us. . .

A I want you to dictate to me a memorandum. . a couple of pages. . four letters words and short sentences several paragraphs so I can read it and study it and commit it to memory not for the purpose of using it now. . I'm not going to give out your figur on 20, 000 killed last year compared to 5, 000. . but on the situation in Viet Nam. . th Viet Nam picture . . if you had to put it in 600 words or maybe a 1, 000 words if you have to go that long. but just like you talk. . . I'd like for you to say that there are several courses that could be followed. . we could send our own divisions in t here

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and our own marines in there and they could start attacking the Viet Cong and the results that would likely flow from that. . we could come out of there. say we're willing to neutralize and let them neutralize South Viet Nam and let the communists take North Viet Nam, and as soon as we get out. . they could swallow up South Viet Nam. . and that would go. . we would pull out and to hell with you, we're going to have. . America. . we're going home. . and tha would mean that. . here's what would happen in Thailand. . and here's what would happen in the Philippines and come on back and get us back to Honolulu. . or we can say this is the Vietnamese war and they've got 200, 000 men, they're untrained, and we've got to bring their morale up, and they have nothing really to fight for because of the type of government they've had. . we can put in socially conscious people and try to get them to improve their own government, and what the people get out of their own government, and we can train them how to fight. . and 200, 000 ~~td~~ ultimately will be able to take care of these 25, 000 -- and that. . after considering all of these. . it seems that the latter offers the best alternative for America to follow. . now if the latter has failed, then, we have to make another decision. . but at this point it has not failed. . and in. . the last month X number of Viet Cong were killed, and X number of South Vietnamese in one day in Korea, we lost 1, 000, or whatever it is. . and that after all. . this is it. Now I'm talking to people every day that are asking this question and I've got to have some kind of a summarized, logical, factual, analysis of it. . and I believe that you could give it to me. . better than anybody else because you've been out there 3 times or four. . whatever it's been. . and I assume that you think that the course we're following is the one that's less. . . least dangerous, and least expensive at the moment, or you'd be advocating another pretty strong. . you may advocate another one after you come back. . . if you don't , why maybe we're wasting money on you going out there, but I would like to have for this period, when everybody is asking me, somehing in my own words, and say why here are the alternativ . . . and here's our theory, and here's what we're basing it on, and we don't say that we're going to win, we don't know, we're doing the best that we can, we've ought to train them. . . . why did you say that we'd send a 1, 000, and I'd put a sentence there, because they completed their mission And ~~their~~ illustration is that several hundred were working as military police and they're trained as military police, and we didn't need to keep them there, and why did McNamara say that they were coming back in '65, because when you say that you're going to give a man a high school education , and he's in the 10th grade, and you've got 2 years to do it, you can train him in 2 years, that doesn't mean that everybody comes back, and that means that you ought to be in pretty good shape by that time, and there are other problems, maybe, and that's waht is said not anything inconsistent, by the people who know nothing about it. But now this morning, . . . well, here's a summary. Senator Scott said about

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thw war in Viet Nam yesterday, said the war which we can neither win nor lose nor drop is evidence of an instability of ideas, a floating series of judgments, our policy of nervous conciliation which is extremely disturbing. There's one of a hundred Senators that says that.. on the front page. of the Baltimore Sun. Senator Javits called on the State Department to issue a white paper documenting a necessity for the U. S. to stay in South Viet Nam... Detroit pres. Senator Kay says we can hardly be worse than we've been doing lately... hoping we'd find other alternatives than two mentioned going in and fighting the American troops, and then pulling them out entirely .. Washington Post. Erwin Kernheim, editor of the Science Monitor, Christian.. says the press conference of the President was placid and calm and non-informative Answers that did not suggest that he was preparing the American people for the worst... and warned that public opinion is not prepared for a big Viet Nam committment such as the '62 Cuban showdown on Korea ..Alexander Kenrcik, ABC, says..the answer cannot be delayed much longer..and he warned that psychologically, we're approaching the Yalu River again...where Chinese, and possibily Russian intervention must be expected..now, they're all saying that following our speech in Los Angeles where we said that this was a very dangerous business..

B Mr. President, may I interrupt you? Who put the line in, I'm curious?

A I don't know..I don't know..don't know..I would assume Bundy. Deeply dangerous game, but I don't see anything wrong with it..even yet. I think it is deeply dangerous when anybody starts aggression. Now that was not where it started at all..I blew my top here for a whole damn week..I jumped on you and jumped on Rusk both why you were saying out in Saigon that you were invading North Viet Nam..even if you were going to invade it Now I know that Roscoe..how he feels..and I know how we all feel, but they came back a week before we said it was a deeply dangerous game.. this stuff was pouring out by reams..and the first story said that military officials in Saigon...it came from Saigon. I talked to you about it, and you said that that wasn't correct, so I jumped on Rusk about it, and Rusk come back and points out the story itself..military officials..and that's where it came from..now the story came from Saigon that we're getting ready to do this...a lot of people in Saigon they tell me said that they got it from the State Department here, that Roscoe had a propaganda move on to really invade North Viet Nam..and always had had it. Now I don't know enough about the interworkings of these two departments, but I know that this thin has gone ten days or a week before we got it, and I can get the clippings a show them where they were pulling it..but now they want to hang it on a little higher person and say that I indicated that we're going to invade Viet

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Nam or that we're going to hit the Chinese, or we're going to bomb Moscow. Now I didn't do anysuch thing.. I said that this is deeply dangerous.. and it is deeply dangerous.. it's dangerous for any nation to start aggression and start enveloping neutral, freedom loving people. And I think it was dangerous to 20,000 of them that got killed there last year.. I think you... I think maybe Pierre did get into an argument with somebody and say this is an important sentence out in California because they were writing about the sentence that said the communists... what was it Phil Potter... communist civil war... and they wanted to know what we meant by civil war and we were talking about the fight that was going on between the Chinese and the Russians, calling each other ugly names and things like that, and we say that is civil war. But, they're trying to transfer this stuff that's been coming out.. Saigon, on to.. this deeply dangerous statement.. and the .. we're just not doing it... they're saying that the administration is putting out all this propaganda itself.. now I'd just give anything in the world if we could stop everybody from talking except the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense and the President, and we could clear those things was not this Los Angeles speech cleared with your department?

B No, I didn't see it.

A Well, it was given to Bundy to clear with everybody.. and it shouldn have be

B There wasn't anything in it I would have changed.

A Well, it ought to be.. now is there anything in the press conference you'd change.

B No, I thought it was excellent though.

A Do you think it's a mistake to explain what I'm saying now about Viet Nam, and what we're faced with.

B Well, I do think, Mr. President, that it would be wise for you to say as little as possible.. the frank answer is we don't know what's going on out there. The signs I see coming through the cables are distubbing signs.. poor morale in Vietnamese forces, poor morale in the armed forces.. disunity, trememdous amount of coup planning against Khanh, not what you'd expect in the situation..

A Why don't we take some pretty offensive steps pretty quickly then, why dont we commend Khanh on his operation and try to prop him up, why don't we raise the salary of the soldiers to improve that morale instead of waiting a long time... why don't we do some of these things that are inclined to bolster them?

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A I sure as hell don't want to get in the position Lodge recommended to me.. the one thing he recommended.. please give us a little more pay for our soldiers, and we turned them down.

B Oh no, we've done that.

A We haven't acted.. we said we're going to wait until you go out there.

B Well, he knows that there's money for that.. there's no problem on that issue.

A Well, then why don't we clear it up so we get him answered.. now I think that politically . . . I'm not a military strategist. . . but I think that as long as we've got him there.. and he makes recommendations.. then we act on them particularly if we act favorably, we're not in too bad a condition politically But when I think that when he wires us and says the only damn thing that you can do is give them an increase in pay because the morale is terrible, we say, well wait, then if something happens in between, I think we are caught with our britches down. And I would give some. . .

B Well, that raise has gone through. . .

A No, we told them that we'd wait.

B No, I think that the raise has gone through to the soldiers, the Vietnamese people are getting the pay, I think it was the first pay.. the increase was to be the latter part of February.. the question is.. and the only question if the is any waiting at all, is whether AID should increase payment to South Vietnamese government to offset the increase.

A Well, then, we ought to decide that because you.. ought to read that wire that he sent us.. that's the best wire we got.. and I replied back.

B I remember it.

A And we ought to take the wire that you sent Khanh as soon as he took over . . for me.. and then got his reply back, and then let's check on it again, and see what he's doing.

B I'll do that.

A Let's make a record on this Bob, so we..

B I agree with you on that. . .

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A I'd like to have a wire out there to him nearly every day or so on something. Either approving what Lodge is recommending, or either trying to boost them up to do a little something extra... now I've been rather impressed from the news reports of this fellows social consciousness.. getting out in the villages and talking to people.. offering them something that they claim that the Nhus and Djims never gave them... this other outfit that took over didn't have time to give them.. and I was rather encouraged by Lodge's cable of yesterday in which he said that he showed more efficiency that either one of them..

B That's right.

A I don't know why his 200,000 are not showing some results... and to please tell Khanh that we think this is absolutely essential to our continued morale here.. or our continued support or something.

B Sure will do that...

A And then you get me this other paper on Viet Nam.. so that when people ask me questions, I have a smattering of information.

B Surely.

A All right.

B Very good, Mr. President.

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